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# Exploring tourist's attitude towards a greener future: do we *really* care?

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## Abstract

Consumers are constantly reminded of their responsibility towards the environment in a world where words such as global warming, carbon footprint, recycling or going green has become common language. What was previously considered to be accepted practices are in many instances frowned upon today and consumers and corporations are expected to contribute towards a greener mother earth. However in South Africa, unused recycle bins, single travellers in luxury cars, busy airports and vast deforested areas for new developments may tell another story. The question arises whether the tourist takes the responsibility to balance the three pillars of sustainability: the planet, its people and profit. Undeniably tourism activities will impact on the environment where a healthy economy is needed in a fast paced global environment. The situation is further complicated in instances where a tourist is using resources which is already included in the product price. A prime example of this is luxurious large bath tubs, towels and bedding which is replaced daily, inclusive use of electricity and water to name a few. This research evaluates and compares environmentally friendly practices of tourists at home versus practices followed whilst on holiday. Data was collected from tourists in the arrival hall of a local airport. Results reveal that there is a general respect for others and one's surroundings but re-use, re-cycle or switching off unused lights or appliances is practices which should be deeper engraved into the behaviour of consumers.

**Keywords:** green, environment, consumer, tourism, sustainable practices

## Introduction

In the past decade, conservation has dramatically influenced consumer behaviour. Practices related to environmental concern and climate change increased and has led to a greater emphasis on green consumerism. The tourism industry is closely linked to the environment and South Africa's natural resources and the industry itself has adopted numerous practices to reduce its impact on mother earth. The tourist on the other hand, can also contribute to green tourism by minimizing waste, using water and electricity sparingly, preserving local cultures, supporting conservation programmes or protection of fauna and

flora. The question however arises to what extent tourists practices green consumerism.

Bergin-Seers and Mair (2009) confirm that some tourists have a stronger outlook about conservation and environmental issues which reflects in their behaviour at home and whilst on holiday. Even though Mensah and Mensah (2013) and Saayman (2013:101) suggest that there is an increased green awareness amongst consumers and tourists in general, environmental impacts of the tourist industry are fuelled by the use of its products. The limited understanding of what tourist behaviour can be considered as sustainable or who environment-

friendly tourists actually are makes it necessary to conduct further research (Dolnicar, Crouch & Long, 2008). As there is little evidence that green intentions have translated into actual behaviour patterns (Bergin-Seers & Muir, 2009) this research aims to result in a better understanding of the attitude and behaviour of tourists towards protection of the environment.

## **Background**

Tourism has become a fierce competitor in commerce overtaking other significant sectors in the past decade. Not only is tourism a vital contributor to the South African economy and gross domestic product (GDP) but also a substantial provider of employment (SA Tourism, 2013). In support, government launched its Tourism Growth Strategy aimed at increasing tourist volume, geographical spread and seasonal arrivals. In 2013, it was reported that South Africa's foreign arrivals are well above the global average growth rate and in number approaching the 10 million mark (SA Tourism, 2013). Annual growth in global tourist arrival numbers has become a global concern and environmental problems such as global warming, deforestation, toxic waste and loss of the ozone layer receive a high priority on world agendas (Gee & Fayos Sola, 1997:36) whilst Saayman (2013:311) confirms that environmental protection has become a globalised concept.

To commerce growth is positive news, however environmental impacts from tourism increases as visitor numbers grow which leads to higher degradation of especially our natural environment. Increased tourist numbers automatically fuels the use of its products such as accommodation, transportation and services. In South Africa especially, tourism is driven by our natural resources such as Table Mountain, the Big Five and the Garden Route. The quality of both natural and man-made environment becomes essential to the successes mentioned above. In the absence of an attractive environment, there would be little tourism (Page, 2007:403). Saayman (2012:62) goes so far as to say that

neglect to protect our environment and natural resources will eventually lead to destruction of human kind.

When tourism is practiced in conflict with the environment it may result in irreparable damage especially to our natural resources (Keyser, 2004:317). This damage includes for instance general infrastructure where development can destroy the environmental resources which is vital to its existence. As early as 1996, the White Paper for Tourism (DEAT, 1996), aimed to protect and develop tourism in South Africa, identified inadequate protection of the environment as one of the key constraints for the tourism industry.

Tourism's relationship with the environment is complex and it may have both positive and negative impacts on the environment. Very often, activities and resources are based or developed within the environment hence making protection thereof essential. Considering the impact of tourism on the environment, the solution lies in the triple bottom line approach where harmony between the environment (planet), the local community (people) and the economic impact (profit) exists (Saayman, 2012:63; George & Rivett-Carnac, 2007:34). An ideal situation would imply a high economic impact, a low environmental impact and a positive impact on the community it serves. A deeper understanding of concepts such as eco-tourism and alternative tourism will support the triple bottom line approach.

## **Ecotourism vs Alternative Tourism**

In the late 1980s increased environmental awareness gave rise to a number of definitions and concepts which includes amongst others eco, responsible, sustainable, nature-based, cultural, green and soft tourism. It is important to note at this stage that nature-based or wildlife tourism (conservation and resource management) for instance should not be assumed to be eco-tourism which is focused on preservation and protection of resources. Nature-based attractions such as for instance Table Mountain in Cape

Town welcomed 23<sup>rd</sup> millionth visitor in 2014 (Table Mountain, 2014). If use of such a nature based attraction is not managed with care, the preservation and protection thereof may cause irreversible damage. In a study on environmental awareness and orientation conducted by Bagri, Gupta and George (2009) amongst different categories of tourists, results indicated that pilgrims and adventurers exhibit superior environmental orientation compared to leisure tourists. With regards to the awareness of ecotourism, none of the groups studied showed great awareness, except that adventurers stand better when compared to the other two groups. The study concluded that 'the transformation of general environmental orientation into awareness of ecotourism is not linear and is much more problematic than is expected'. Nowadays, Wearing and Neil (2009:xi-xii) suggest off-the-beaten-track travel to be the best way to travel.

Most definitions describing eco-tourism refers to the balance of preserving or sustaining and developing of the environment. The common phrases included in eco-tourism definitions include ' ecological and environmental impact', cultural sensitivity, managing of economic benefits, tourist satisfaction, preservation, protection, sustainability and the local communities (Weaver, 2001:104). On the other hand, environmentally friendly practices may include the following activities (Saayman, 2012:67-68):

- Responsible use of water and electricity;
- Management of waste, water and sewage;
- Green building developments and infrastructure;
- Protection of fauna and flora;
- Local products which have a smaller carbon footprint.

### **Environmental behaviour**

Conscious efforts are made globally to protect the environment which may lead to the question: whose responsibility it is to protect our environment. The textbook

answer should be that all role players, consumers and parties involved should see it as a joint responsibility. In the tourism industry specifically this is evident in the role of accommodation establishments that have switched to solar power, energy saving bulbs and auto switches in rooms whilst airplane manufacturers have reduced carbon emissions drastically with newly designed aircraft.

Kasim (2004) points out that the responsibility has further spread to watchdog organisations and accreditation schemes, all aimed at greater awareness yet reports that 'little empirical knowledge of tourists' demand for responsible hotels', particularly within the context of a developing countries are available. From the consumer side, recent research conducted by Millar and Mayer (2012) indicated that respondents felt morally obliged to behave in an environmentally manner at home and whilst on holiday. Lassen (2010) makes the statement to say that external factors have a greater effect on tourist behaviour than the environmental attitude of the tourist.

The level of responsibility may often be measured by means of financial commitment. Here, Dolnicar (2010) conducted research on the willingness of tourists to pay for environmental protection. The research results indicated that 'environmentally responsible tourists who are willing to pay for environmental initiatives taken on by their tour operator can be characterized by a distinct profile with respect to travel information seeking, destination preferences, travel behavior, and willingness to pay--indicating that targeting such a segment of tourists in the general tourism context represents an attractive supplementary strategy to traditional supply.' Pereira, Mykletun and Hippolyte (2012) went one step further to explore the relationship between practices and believes of the concept 'environmentally-friendly' which indicated a positive relationship between to appreciation of sustainability in the daily encounters as well as holiday purchases of consumers. This however does not

seems to be the case in all instances as research conducted by Budeanu (2007) showed that despite the declared positive attitudes towards sustainable tourism, a limited number of tourists act accordingly by purchasing responsible, environmentally friendly tourism products. As an solution, Sirakaya-Turk, Baloglu and Haylee (2014) suggest that hoteliers use specifically targeted green rooms for the 'stronger-sustainer' tourists. Finally Mu, Zhuling and Wanwan (2013) adds to the responsibility by finding that the tourists' emotion to be the most powerful predictor of their behaviour.

'Tourists, as the behavioral agent of tourist destination environment, need to implement environmentally responsible behavior which helps to promote the sustainable development of tourism. Therefore, how to cultivate tourists' environmentally responsible behavior has become one of the most engaging topics in the field of sustainable tourism' (Fan, Qui & Wu, 20140).

## **Methodology**

Explorative research is generally aimed at the gathering of information to gain a better understanding of problems, hypothesis or suggestions (Kotler & Armstrong, 2006:122-123) which may lead to answering of the research questions. Qualitative research was conducted amongst respondents at a local airport representing the gathering place of general members of the public that use tourism products and services. The data was collected by means of a structured questionnaire which was developed after a comprehensive literature review of previous related studies. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: section A focused on the demographic profile of respondents while section B sought to determine the behaviour and

attitude of respondents whilst at home. Statements generally related to environmental concern was used for this purpose. Section C consisted of exactly the same questions but related to behaviour and attitude whilst on holiday. Behaviour and attitude was measured by means of a 5-point Likert scale (importance) where 1 never and 5 is almost always. Probability sampling was used due to its main characteristic of randomness.

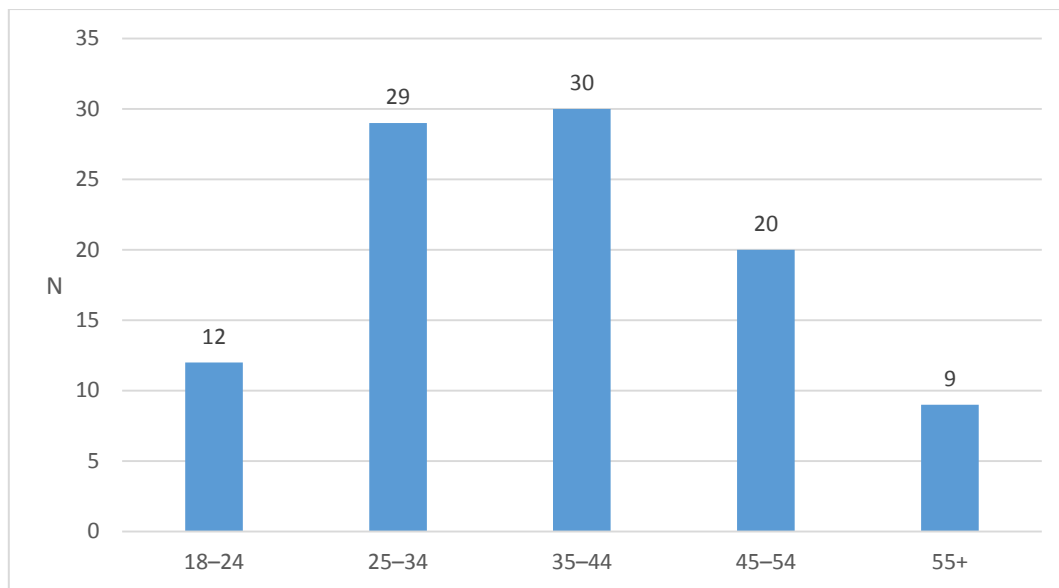
Microsoft Excel was used to capture the data from 100 usable questionnaires whilst SPSS was used for the analysis thereof. The first stage of the analysis consisted of descriptive statistics whilst the second stage statistical testing was used to determine the Environmentally Friendly (EF) score whilst the Spearman correlations were used to compare home and holiday behaviour.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Demographic profile of respondents**

The majority of the respondents were females (54%) holding a first degree (32%) traveling for business (40%), aged between 35 – 44 years, earning a salary of between R30 000 and R39 000 monthly (30%). During business travel the preferred accommodation type was 4/5 star hotel accommodation (51%) whilst bed and breakfast or a guesthouse was used whilst on holiday (44%). In the section to follow, some of the demographic results will be elaborated upon.

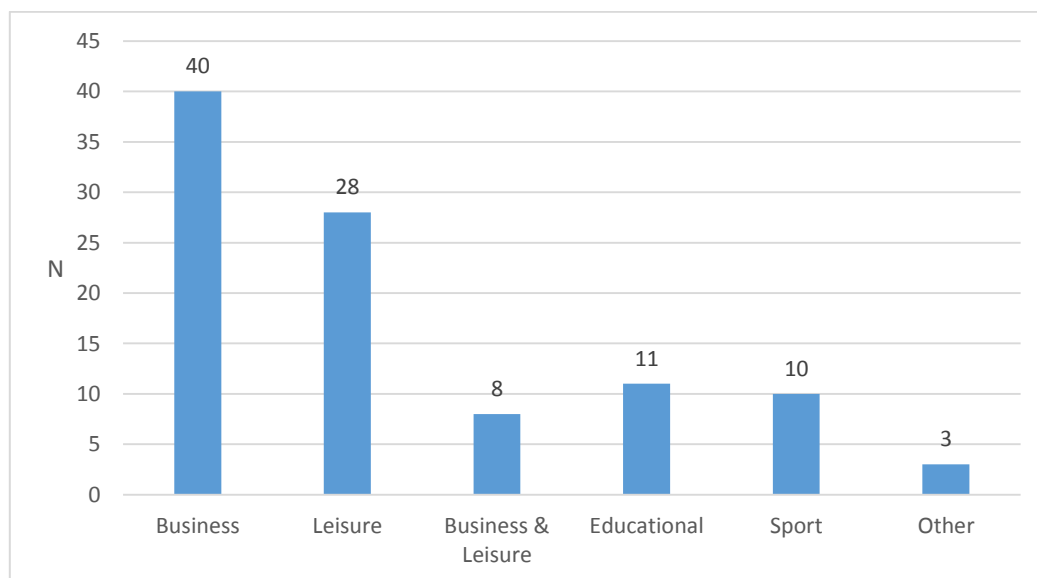
Figure 1 depicts the age distribution of the respondents from which it is evident that the respondents constituted a good spread across the various age categories, with the categories 35–44 and 25–34 being the most represented and together forming 59% of the sample.



**Figure 1: Age distribution**

From Figure 2 it can be seen that Business and/or Leisure accounted for the most respondents (76%), although business itself (whether only or also in

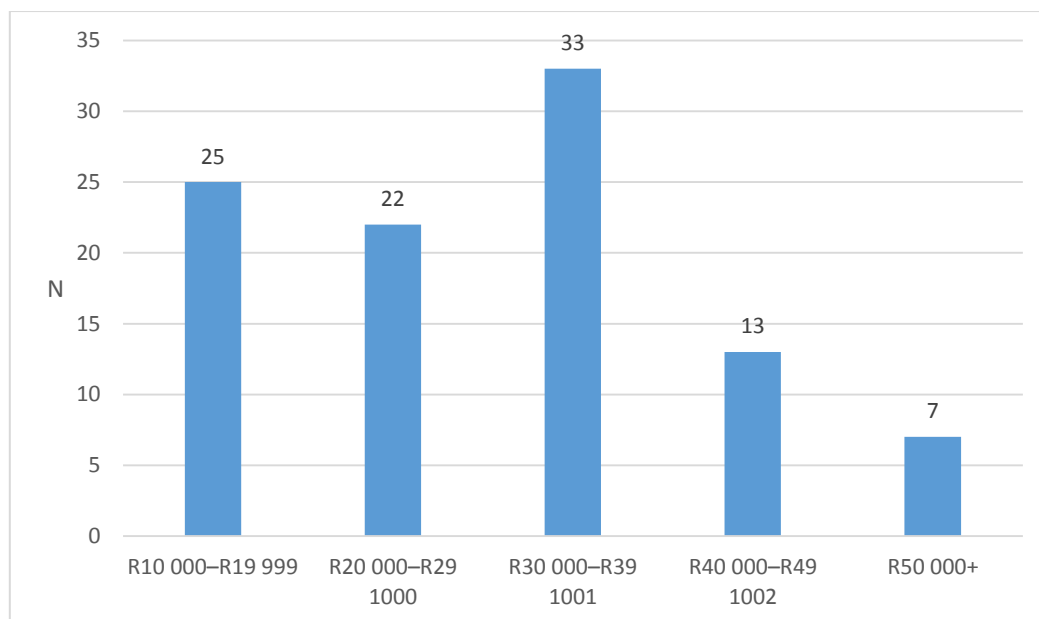
combination with leisure) was by far the biggest motive for travel amongst the respondents, accounting for almost half of the respondents.



**Figure 2: Tourist type**

The tourists seemed to be relatively affluent, with the largest single income category being R30 000–R39 999 (Figure

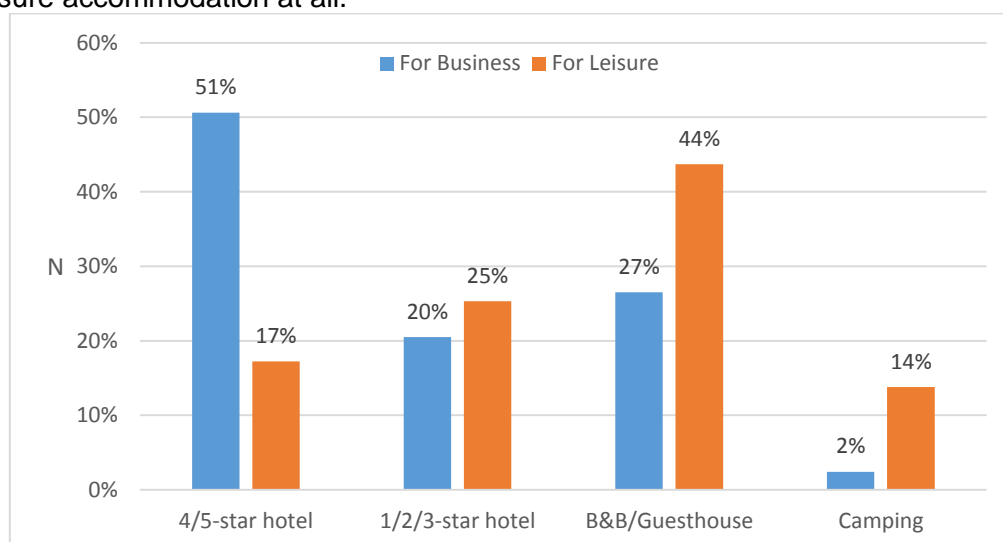
3), although it should be added that only 20% of the sample were above this category.



**Figure 3: Income category**

From figure 4 it is evident that most of the respondents tended to choose more modest accommodation when paying themselves, as can be seen when their choice of accommodation for business and camping are shown. It should be noted, though, that only 70% of respondents made use of *both* business and leisure accommodation. Seventeen per cent did not use business accommodation at all, and 13% did not use leisure accommodation at all.

However, when the preferences for these respondents were cross tabulated, only six chose leisure accommodation at a higher level than they indicated for business travel, 30% chose the same level of accommodation for both business and leisure, and 34% chose more modest accommodation for leisure travel than for business travel—a statistically significant distribution ( $\chi^2=23.98$ ,  $df=9$ ,  $p=0.004$ ).



**Figure 4: Accommodation preference**

Respondents were then asked to indicate their agreement (Yes/No) with fifteen

statements generally related to environmental concern (listed in Appendix

A). If they indicated agreement with any item, they were given a point, and the points were tallied to give each respondent an Environmental-Friendliness score (EF). These scores ranged from 7–15, with a median of 11, indicating that the sample was relatively environmentally friendly. However, no statistically significant differences could be found in the EF scores for different genders, ages, income or education groups, nor for the purpose of their travelling. This non-significant finding should, nonetheless, not be interpreted negatively. It could just represent a sampling artefact, but it could also indicate that the necessity of caring for one's environment has penetrated the

different age levels equally well, as it has the various upper levels—the demographic data do indicate that flying remains the preserve of the relatively well educated and the relatively wealthy portion of the population—of income and education.

Finally, respondents were asked to indicate their agreement (on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Never to Always) with several environmentally friendly practices, both when on holiday, and when at home. The congruence between the respondents' behaviour at home and when on holiday was examined in two ways, shown

on holiday as at home, a positive difference score would mean that they were more likely to engage in the practice while on holiday than when at home, and a negative score would indicate that they would be more likely to engage in the practice when at home than when on holiday.

From

to the remaining items which showed negative congruence (i.e., less likely to do on holiday than when at home), it seemed as if the items with congruence seemed more concerned with either deeply ingrained practices (boiling only enough water, or using wood for cooking) or with practices reflecting a general respect towards others or one's surroundings. The items which showed negative congruence tended to reflect either an attitude of "I'm not paying, so I don't need to save" (e.g., not switching off to save electricity or limiting use).

**Table 1:** Firstly, the Spearman correlation between their responses at home and on holiday was computed. Secondly, a difference score was calculated, being their behaviour at home subtracted from their behaviour when on holiday. A difference score of zero would thus mean that their behaviour was totally congruent—that they did the same things

**Table 1** it is evident that some practices seem to be well-engrained amongst the respondents, while others showed much less congruence between when they were at home or on holiday. Only one practice showed a positive difference score, viz. that they were more likely to use air conditioners when on holiday than when at home. This could simply be a function of many holiday accommodation facilities having air conditions, and relatively fewer homes having air conditioners.

Interestingly, when comparing the practices in which there was congruence

**Table 1: Environmental practices**

Practice	□	Difference		
		Min	Median	Max
Switch off unused electrical appliances such as TV/lights	.13	-4	-2	1
Switch off lights when you leave the room/in unoccupied room	.07	-4	-1	2

Use hot water sparingly	.15	-4	-1	2
Use air conditioner	-.08	-3	2	4
Boil only as much water in the kettle as you need	.27**	-4	0	4
Re-cycle (e.g. paper or plastic bags)	.19	-4	-2	4
Re-use (e.g. towel/bedding)	.32**	-4	-2	2
Avoid noise pollution (evening/early morning)	.37**	-4	0	3
Protect fauna/flora	.49**	-4	0	4
Respect local art/traditions	.62**	-4	0	2
Use locally manufactured products	.44**	-4	0	4
Comply with TV-prompts to reduce the use of electricity	.12	-4	-1	3
Use wood to make a fire (cooking or heating)?	.68**	-4	0	3

Despite the indication of congruence or lack thereof, the question remained as to how the respondents actually complied with these practices. Although several approaches could be taken, it was decided to use the minimum score of the two (whether at home or on holiday) as the indicator of compliance for each respondent. These scores are shown in

Figure5. From this several interesting trends can be seen. Firstly, it is evident that the respondents generally do not

reuse or recycle. Secondly, compliance with Eskom's prompts to use less electricity is generally low. Furthermore, respect of fauna and flora, as well as for art and customs is quite good, and the respondents also generally do work sparingly with electricity and hot water (which may account for the low compliance to use less electricity—if one believes that one is already using electricity sparingly, one might be less inclined to find additional ways of sparing even more).

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always	
Switch off unused electrical appliances	10	10	40	11	29	
Switch off lights when you leave the room/in unoccupied room	15	5	31	18	31	
Use hot water sparingly	2	9	46	17	26	
Use air conditioner	49	18	23	6	4	
Boil only as much water in the kettle as you need	11	8	50	14	17	
Re-cycle (eg. paper or plastic bags)	61	12	13	3	11	
Re-use (eg. towel/bedding)	57	12	7	12	12	
Avoid noise pollution (evening/early morning)	9	12	50	10	19	
Protect fauna/flora	9	16	13	30	32	
Respect local art/traditions	3	6	23	26	42	
Use locally manufactured products	9	6	52	18	15	
Comply with TV-prompts to reduce the use of electricity	17	38	23	6	16	
Use wood to make a fire (cooking or heating)?	58	12	21	6	3	

**Figure5: Compliance with environmental practices**



## Conclusion

The introduction to the study raised numerous questions related to a general increase in green awareness of tourists and their becoming more concerned with the basic principles of environmental responsibility. The solution to growing tourism sector and increased international tourist arrivals is to ensure that the overall impact of tourism and its related activities is neutralised by the behaviour and attitude of the tourists using such product and services.

Tourism is an important revenue generator which makes it important to understand, support and take responsibility for preservation and protection of our planet. It is therefore becomes necessary for tourism authorities, policy makers and product owners to clearly understand the attitude, preferences and expectations of the tourist when developing and implementing products, policies and services. The availability of sustainable travel products and services with reduced carbon offsetting and environmental impacts need to be increased making it easier for the tourist to consume such products.

## Future research

Although statistical testing indicated no correlation between results and specific demographics of this population, it would be interesting to use the same research method and tools to collect data from a wider population such as scholars, students, less educated or less affluent respondents, respondents from rural areas and government officials and policy makers. Kachel and Jennings (2010) suggest the need for this research agenda including the 'influences over time and the multiple and diverse nature of tourists' environmental learning experiences along with their social reconstruction'.

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#### **Appendix A: Statements indicating environmental concern**

Would you describe yourself as someone who cares about the environment?

Are you a member / do you support any environmentally friendly projects?

Do you practise sustainable environmental practices AT HOME?

Do you practise sustainable environmental practices whilst ON HOLIDAY?

Does global warming concern you?

Do you care about endangered species / plants?

Have you ever contributed financially to a sustainability/environmental project?

Do you use any type of solar heating at home?

Are you prepared to pay more for an environmentally friendly product?

Would you become part of a lift club to reduce carbon emissions going to work?

Do you use energy saver bulbs at home?

Does your carbon footprint bother you?

Do you think pollution is a problem?

Are you well aware / educated about how to support environmental practices?

Use environmentally friendly products e.g. Ozone-friendly (cleaning/deodorant)